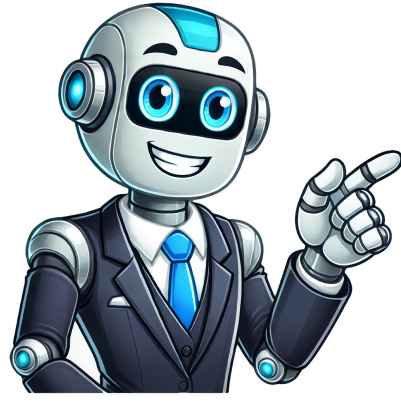


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Your pelvic floor muscles sit at the base of your pelvis. They help to keep your bladder, uterus, vagina and bowel (pelvic organs) in the right place. Your pelvic floor muscles should be kept strong and active, just like any other muscle. All bladder and bowel functions need good pelvic floor muscles. For example, when you need to go to the toilet, you use your pelvic floor muscles to prevent any leaks. Then, you will fully relax them to pass urine when you physically get to the toilet. Strong pelvic floor muscles boost your core strength and stability. They can improve your sexual function too. Life events like having a baby or ageing can impact your pelvic floor muscles. But it's never too early or late to start exercising these muscles. Pelvic floor issues are not an inevitable part of ageing. Maintaining a strong pelvic floor may help prevent issues in the future. This video requires Marketing cookies. Update your consent. This video requires YouTube cookies. Update your consent. There are a few different ways to exercise your pelvic floor. When doing your pelvic floor exercises, start off in a comfortable position. For example, sitting or lying down. As you get more practice with the exercise, you can try these exercises in different positions, such as standing, walking or bending. To exercise your pelvic floor, you should: Close the back passage (as if you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind but try not to clench your buttocks). Try to squeeze your vaginal muscles up and in - try not to pull your stomach in when you're doing this. Do a combination of both long and short squeezes. Squeeze and hold the muscles tight - you should try to hold for around 10 seconds, but you might have to work up to this. Try to find the length of time that is right for you to start with, which might only be a few seconds. Relax fully and breathe normally for about 5 seconds. Try to do 10 repetitions with a full relaxation in between each. Relaxation is just as important as the actual exercise for building a strong pelvic floor. Squeeze your pelvic muscles tight and hold for 1 second. Relax fully (like with the long squeezes), breathing normally as you rest. Aim for up to 10 'lift and let go' contractions. You should aim to complete 10 of each exercise (10 long and 10 short squeezes) 3 times per day. You might not be able to do this straight away, but you can build up to it. Do not be put off if you don't see an improvement straight away. It may take several weeks to notice an improvement. Pelvic floor care is a lifetime habit. There are apps available online designed to help you make pelvic floor exercises part of your daily routine. To do kegels properly, Treacy says to think beyond stopping the flow of urine. "That action doesn't engage all of the muscles of the pelvic floor, which is necessary in order to strengthen them," she says. Starting in Supta Badha Konasana while performing kegels makes the pelvic floor muscles more pliable by stretching the inner thighs.How to do kegels: Lie on your back on a yoga mat and bring the soles of your feet together. Place support under your outer thighs, such as yoga blocks or rolled-up hand towels. Relax here for three to five deep breaths. Then, visualize the muscles of your pelvic floor. Take a big breath in, and as you exhale, draw the muscles between your sit bones together as if they were two elevator doors closing to meet in the middle. Once the doors are closed, lift the elevator up and then release.Next, imagine the pelvic floor muscles between your pubic bone and tailbone as two elevator doors-and on an exhale, draw those muscles together to meet in the middle, lift the elevator, and then release. Finally, draw all four elevator doors together at once, meeting at one point in the middle, then lift. Do five reps. Pelvic floor exercises can help strengthen weak muscles and relax muscles that are too tight. These muscles hold the pelvic organs—bladder, intestines, urethra, rectum, and additionally the vagina, cervix, and uterus in females, and prostate in males—in place. People of any age can experience pelvic floor conditions that can benefit from pelvic floor exercises. This article discusses pelvic floor exercises—what they are, how to do them, and potential benefits and side effects. All people no matter their sex or gender have a pelvic floor. It is located below your abdomen in your pelvis—the curved bone structure between your hips—and supports the organs in your pelvis. Before you start pelvic floor exercises, consult with a healthcare provider to ensure your symptoms are related to muscle tightness or weakness and not an underlying health condition like pelvic organ prolapse (when pelvic organs drop because of muscle weakness) or bladder problems (like bladder control loss). Pelvic floor exercises, or Kegel exercises, are not for everyone. Kegels can help strengthen the pelvic floor, but if your muscles are tight, they can worsen your condition. Consider seeing a physical therapist specializing in pelvic floor therapy to ensure you perform the most appropriate exercises for your condition. In addition to supporting the uterus (womb), vagina, and cervix (the lower, narrow end of the uterus where it enters the vagina) in people with female anatomy, it also supports the bladder, rectum (the last section of the large intestine), and urethra (the tube that empties urine from the bladder). Pelvic floor exercises can benefit any person of any gender, regardless of their anatomy. Tight (hypertonic) pelvic floor muscles can cause health concerns like bladder problems or pain during intercourse. Exercises for tight muscles focus on relaxing the pelvic floor. Mihail Mihaylov / Getty Images Diaphragmatic breathing reduces muscle tension throughout the body, including the pelvic floor. It also helps to decrease the pain that tight pelvic floor muscles can cause. Perform as follows: Lie on your back on a firm surface. Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Slowly breathe in through your nose, filling your belly with air. The hand on your stomach should rise while the hand on your chest stays still. Pucker your lips (like you're blowing out candles) and slowly blow the air back out. Perform for five breaths. Iulia Burnistrova / Getty Images If the adductors (inner thigh muscles) are very tight, rest your knees on pillows during this stretch to decrease muscle tension. Perform as follows: Lie on your back on a firm surface.Bend both knees and bring the soles of your feet together, with the outer border of each foot resting on the ground.Slowly allow your knees to drop to the sides—you should feel a stretch along the inside of your thighs.Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, and repeat three times. The child's pose spreads your pelvic bones apart to help stretch your pelvic floor muscles. Perform as follows: Begin on your hands and knees.Keeping your elbows straight, sit back on your heels while kneeling.Bend forward and rest your belly on your thighs.Rest your forehead on the ground between your shoulders.Take several deep breaths. Use your arms to gently stretch your pelvis open to help stretch pelvic floor muscles with the happy baby pose. Perform as follows: Lie on your back on a firm surface.Bend both knees and bring your feet toward your hands.Grasp the outer edge of each foot with your hands.Pull your knees toward your armpits and relax your knees outward.Hold for several breaths. If this pose is too difficult, place your hands behind your knees instead. Excess strain on the pelvic floor muscles from chronic coughing due to smoking, pressure from chronic constipation, pregnancy, and childbirth can weaken these muscles. Additional factors such as age, weak tissues, and surgery can weaken your pelvic floor muscles. Here are some exercises to strengthen weak pelvic floor muscles. Kegels help strengthen muscles that support your bladder. Perform as follows: Lie on your back on a firm surface.Tighten your pelvic floor muscles—squeeze your muscles as if trying to stop the flow of urine midstream.Hold for three to five seconds, then relax.Repeat 10 times. Perform Kegels at least three times per day. Once you've mastered Kegels lying down, you can do them while sitting or standing. Prostock-Studio / Getty Images Advance your pelvic floor strength by combining Kegels with a hip bridge. This exercise also strengthens abdominal and low back muscles that support your pelvic floor. Perform as follows: Lie on your back on a firm surface.Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor.Squeeze your buttocks and lift your hips off the floor. Keep your shoulder blades in contact with the floor.While in the bridge position, contract your pelvic floor for three seconds.Relax your pelvic floor and lower your hips back down to the ground.Repeat 10 times. zamznatitonov / Getty Images Clamshells strengthen muscles in the hips that work with your pelvic floor muscles. Perform as follows: Lie on your right side with your legs stacked on each other.Bend your knees at approximately 45 degrees.Contract your pelvic floor muscles and lift your top knee toward the ceiling (like a clamshell opening). Hold for two to three seconds.Lower your leg back down and relax your pelvic floor.Do 10 repetitions on each leg. While some exercises improve pelvic floor function, others can make it worse. One 2018 study looking at elite athletes found that 52% of female athletes in the study experienced urinary incontinence, with the highest rates seen in gymnasts. Most people are probably not taking to the gym mat regularly, but this study illustrates the effects of high-impact exercise on pelvic floor health. Some examples of high-impact exercises to avoid when dealing with pelvic floor dysfunction include the following: Heavy weight liftingRunningActivities that require jumpingHigh-intensity conditioning exercises (such as step aerobics) Safe, low-impact alternative exercises include: As your pelvic muscles improve, you can progress to higher-level activities. Pelvic floor exercises can help treat conditions and symptoms related to both tight and weak pelvic floor muscles. Hypertonic (tense) pelvic floor muscles can occur from trauma during childbirth and conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome. Hypertonic pelvic floor muscles can cause: Pain during sexA strong urge to urinate or urinary incontinenceConstipationPelvic or abdominal pain Relaxation exercises can reduce pain and decrease the incidence of incontinence. Pelvic floor muscles can weaken after childbirth and develop from intense exercises like heavy weight lifting. Weak pelvic floor muscles can cause: Strengthening exercises can reduce incontinence and the excessive passing of gas, as well as support internal organs. However, in severe cases, pelvic organ prolapse can require surgery. While pelvic floor exercises should not increase pain, conditions that affect these muscles are often painful. Treatments that can help decrease this pain include: Whether you are trying to decrease tightness in your pelvic floor muscles or improve your strength, it can take several months (or longer) to see improvements. If you do need to do the exercises every day, sit, stand or lie with your knees slightly apart. Slowly tighten your pelvic muscles under the bladder as hard as you can. Hold to the count of five, then relax. These are called slow pull-ups or long squeezes. Then do the same exercise quickly and immediately let go again. These are called fast pull-ups or short squeezes. The aim is to do a long squeeze followed by ten short squeezes, and repeat this cycle at least eight times. It should only take about five minutes.Aim to do the above exercises at least three times a day.Ideally, do each set of exercises in different positions. That is, sometimes when sitting, sometimes when standing and sometimes when lying down.As the muscles become stronger, increase the length of time you hold each slow pull-up or long squeeze. You are doing well if you can hold it each time for a count of 10 (about 10 seconds).Do not squeeze other muscles at the same time as you squeeze your pelvic floor muscles. For example, do not use any muscles in your back, thighs, or buttocks.Some people find it difficult to remember to do their exercises; a chart or a reminder on your phone may help.Try to get into the habit of doing your exercises at other times too, whilst going about everyday life. For example, when brushing your teeth, waiting for the kettle to boil, when washing up, etc.You may find it helpful to do a 'squeeze' just before you do something that would otherwise cause you to leak, like coughing or lifting.After several weeks the muscles will start to feel stronger. You may find you can squeeze the pelvic floor muscles for much longer without the muscles feeling tired.It takes time, effort and practice to become good at pelvic floor exercises/Kegels. It is best to do these exercises for at least three months to start with. You should start to see benefits after a few weeks. However, it often takes two to five months for most improvement to occur. After this time you may be cured of stress incontinence. If you are not sure that you are doing the correct exercises, ask a doctor, physiotherapist or continence advisor for advice.If possible, continue exercising as a part of everyday life for the rest of your life. Once incontinence has gone, you may only need to do one or two bouts of exercise each day to keep the pelvic floor muscles strong and toned up and to prevent incontinence from coming back.Sometimes a continence advisor or physiotherapist will advise extra methods if you are having problems or need some extra help performing the pelvic floor exercises. There are in addition to the above exercises. For example-Electrical stimulation. Sometimes a special electrical device is used to stimulate the pelvic floor muscles with the aim of making them contract and become stronger.Biofeedback. This is a technique to help you make sure that you exercise the correct muscles. For this, a physiotherapist or continence advisor inserts a small device into your vagina when you are doing the exercises. When you squeeze the right muscles, the device makes a noise (or some other signal such as a display on a computer screen) to let you know that you are squeezing the correct muscles.Vaginal cones. These are small plastic cones that you put inside your vagina for about 15 minutes, twice a day. The cones come in a set of different weights. At first, the lightest cone is used. You will naturally use your pelvic floor muscles to hold the cone in place. This is how they help you to exercise your pelvic floor muscles. Once you can hold on to the lightest one comfortably, you move up to the next weight and so on.Other devices. There are various other devices that are sold to help with pelvic floor exercises. Basically, they all rely on placing the device inside the vagina with the aim of helping the pelvic muscles to exercise and squeeze. There is little research evidence to show how well these devices work. It is best to get the advice from a continence advisor or physiotherapist before using any. One general point is that if you use one, it should be in addition to, not instead of, the standard pelvic floor exercises described above.If you are not used to doing pelvic floor exercises then perhaps do the exercises as often as described above for the first three months or so. This will strengthen up the pelvic floor muscles. Thereafter, a five-minute spell of pelvic floor exercises once or twice a day should keep the muscles strong and toned up which may help to prevent incontinence from developing in later life. Getty ImagesWhen Charlotte York Goldenblatt proudly boasted about her pelvic floor strengthening routine in an episode of And Just Like That, some viewers may have cringed...but I clapped. The pelvic floor rarely (if ever) gets major public attention, let alone a ringing endorsement from a famous character. It's one example of how this once whispers-only topic is getting the attention it deserves. But the pelvic floor is still wildly misunderstood, and kegels are just one of the ways to train it. Meet the experts: Liz Miracle, PT, is the head of clinical quality and education at Origin pelvic floor physical therapy clinic. Leigh Taylor Weissman, CPT, is a New York City-based trainer and glute specialist with the Leigh Taylor Method.Antonietta Vicario is the chief training officer for Polve, which offers a dedicated PF training series.What is the pelvic floor?The pelvic floor is the base of the core. It's a group of muscles at the bottom of the pelvis, like a hammock that supports internal organs and assists sexual function. We can't actually see these muscles, so they don't get the shiny marketing of the six-pack's rectus abdominis. But "they're responsible for helping transfer load from between your legs to your abdomen," says Liz Miracle, PT, head of clinical quality and education at Origin pelvic floor physical therapy clinic. More and more fitness pros are covering floor function these days (hoorah!). For example, programs like Polve and The Sculpt Society feature comprehensive pelvic floor series, and trainers such as Leigh Taylor Weissman, CPT, a New York City-based trainer and glute specialist, design workouts based on preventing dysfunction and encouraging proper engagement for, say, a stronger, sculpted backside. FYI: If your sweat sessions include impact activities like running, you need to be intentional about deep core work to function optimally. Weissman says. (One type of pelvic floor dysfunction, urinary incontinence, is more prevalent in women who do high-impact sports over their lifetime, according to a study in the American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology.) Read on for the circuit that dials in deep and preps you for all-over gains. Cue yourself: If you're intentional about your breathing, any exercise can activate the pelvic floor, Weissman says. Consider a deadlift: "As you exhale, "imagine pulling a zipper from below the pubic bone up to the belly button," she says. Then take a deep belly breath and allow the stomach to expand and the pelvic floor to release as you lower. Double duty! Best Pelvic Floor ExercisesThis express routine includes one exercise for each major muscle group that works in tandem with the pelvic floor—hips, abdominals, glutes, and adductors—plus cues on tightening and relaxing for all the deep-core benefits. "One of the best ways to strengthen these specific muscles is to engage all of the muscles around them," says Antonietta Vicario, chief training officer for Polve. It takes practice to nail the coordination, so keep moves slow and controlled. Before you know it, they'll be second nature. Instructions: Perform three sets of 8 to 12 reps of each move three times a week.1. Bridge With Squeeze How to:Lie faceup with legs bent and feet flat and hip-width apart, a pillow, small ball or yoga block between knees. As you exhale, think about "lifting" PF as you contract it, drawing belly to spine and squeezing glutes to lift pelvis toward ceiling. Slowly, and with control, lower hips to mat. That's 1 rep. Why it rocks » When your pelvis is up, gravity is helping you draw the PF toward your head to achieve that lifting sensation. Strengthening in this position makes it easier to connect to the PF when you're engaging the inner thighs and glutes in other exercises, says Miracle.2. Clamshell How to:Lie on right side with knees bent 90 degrees, feet in line with hips and head resting on right arm, left hand pressed into mat near waist. (Option to elevate upper body, as shown.)Exhale, contracting core and lifting PF as you raise top knee to open legs, keeping heels together and hips stacked. Lower leg with control and relax through PF to return to start. That's 1 rep. Complete all reps on one side before switching. Why it rocks » This position targets the hip rotators and can make it more difficult to contract the PF. It's worth the effort, though. Focusing on this exercise alone can help reduce incontinence symptoms, says Miracle.3. 90/90 Taps How to:Lie faceup with knees bent, feet flat on floor and hip-width apart. Exhale to squeeze and lift PF, drawing belly button toward spine. Engage core and keep knees bent as you raise one leg at a time until shins are parallel to floor. Slowly lower right foot to tap mat with heel.Reverse motion to return to start. Repeat with other leg. That's 1 rep.Why it rocks » This exercise allows you to focus on the leg motion while coordinating the PF and the transverse abdominis for stability.4. Squat How to: Stand with feet hip-width apart. Exhale and engage entire core, squeezing and lifting PF muscles and drawing belly button to spine to prepare. Bend knees and lower hips as if sitting down into a chair, inhaling and relaxing PF. Engage glutes to return to standing, exhaling and bracing core and lifting PF. That's 1 rep.Why it rocks » Squats work the glutes and quads, and the glutes are one of the larger muscles that co-contract with the PF.What causes pelvic floor dysfunction?If a not-quite optimal deep core brought you here, there are a few common causes that are likely to blame, according to Miracle.Pregnancy and birth: Nine months of added downward pressure and nerve/tissue damage from delivery can strain and weaken the pelvic floor and disrupt the neuromuscular connection.Impact sports: Any activity in which your body must provide support in the pelvis in order to counteract both the force of impact and the pressure inside the abdomen is taxing. Good examples are running, jumping rope, and powerlifting.Asthma and allergies: Repeated coughing adds force on the pelvic floor that can lead to damage and loosening of the muscles. In fact, coughing can create more intra-abdominal pressure than many exercises, per a review in Sports Medicine. Fascinating!High stress and anxiety: Stress can cause muscles like the pelvic floor to physically tense up and tighten—and not in a good way.Poor posture and prolonged sitting: The hips and spine are connected to the pelvis, so problems along the chain can spur other muscles (including the PF) to overcompensate. Hours in a chair, compressing the hips and spine, and inactivity are big factors here.Benefits Of Pelvic Floor ExercisesThe perks of training the pelvic floor go beyond prevention: better core strength leads to improved fitness performance, multiple studies show. And since the diaphragm and pelvic floor work in concert, elevated floor function can increase breath volume, leading to improved endurance in sports, says Miracle.That's why all women can reap the rewards of pelvic floor exercises. "The pelvic floor is going to be the new six-pack," says Weissman. All righty, then! Jennifer NiedJennifer Nied is the fitness editor at Women's Health and has more than 10 years of experience in health and wellness journalism. She's always out exploring—sweat-testing exercises and gear, hiking, snowboarding, running, and more—with her husband, daughter, and dog. Your pelvic floor is essential for basic bodily functions, like bladder control, bowel movements, sexual responses and childbirth. Image Credit: PixelCatcher/E+/GettyImages When you think of the pelvic floor—the basket of muscles that sit at the bottom of your pelvis—you may think of it as a weak muscle. But a functional pelvic floor is super important for more than a healthy pregnancy and postpartum experience and for people of all sexes. It plays a big role in healthy bathroom habits, sexual function, a strong core and more, explains Marcy Crouch, PT, DPT, a board-certified clinical specialist in women's health and creator of The DT Method. The Benefits of a Functional Pelvic Floor But what exactly is the pelvic floor? In short, it's a group of muscles that run side to side (sit bone to sit bone) and front to back (pubic bone to tailbone); these muscles are made up of skeletal muscle—the same makeup of your hamstrings or biceps, Crouch says. "Because these muscles sit at the bottom of the pelvis, they have lots of functions that we rely on." A big one is support; your pelvic floor holds up your pelvic organs and your body weight. "They are the 'floor' of the core," Crouch says. They also play an important role in bladder control. "The rectum and urethra (the tube that urine flows out of) pierce through the pelvic floor," she explains. "When your bladder is filling with urine, the pelvic floor muscles turn on and lift up to close the urethra so urine doesn't leak out. When we get the urge to void, we go to the bathroom, sit down, the pelvic floor muscles release and the bladder muscle pushes urine out." These muscles are also involved in sexual function, namely erections and orgasms, adds Rachel Gelman, PT, DPT, a pelvic floor therapist in San Francisco, California. And if this whole system isn't working optimally, you can wind up experiencing leaking urine, painful urination, frequency or urgency, incomplete emptying, constipation, hemorrhoids and more, experts say. How to Make Your Pelvic Floor More Functional But here's the thing: Strengthening your pelvic floor isn't always the solution. "These muscles need to relax and lengthen to allow urine and poop to come out, and they need to contract and relax for orgasms to happen—so length is just as important as strength," Gelman explains. After all, in order to be truly functional, a muscle has to be functional through its entire range of motion. "Think of the biceps: If the biceps are contracted all the time, your elbow won't be flexed and you can't use your arm well. Same with the pelvic floor," Crouch says. And that's why the "bread and butter" of pelvic floor exercises—the Kegel, a sharpening contraction of the pelvic floor—isn't the sole answer to a more functional pelvic floor. People with vaginas are "told over and over again to do kegels, which is incorrect," Crouch says. "It's more about proper contraction technique and coupling that with synergist muscles for the best contraction and correct breathing, and incorporating this into functional activities." The Best Pelvic Floor Exercises to Try Pelvic floor physical therapists can help anyone learn to do kegels—and other effective pelvic floor exercises—the right away. Here's a look at some of the other exercises they keep in their repertoire. Engage your pelvic floor muscles by lifting up and in, like you're holding in urine. Sets 3 Reps 10 Region Core and Lower Body Lie on your side, stacking your top leg directly over your bottom one. Bend your bottom leg and keep your top leg straight. Engage your pelvic floor by lifting up and gently squeezing your pelvic floor muscles. Keeping your pelvic floor engaged and your hips pointing forward, lift the top leg up and down. Don't hold your breath or push out through your stomach. Complete 3 sets of 10 reps on each side. Sets 2 Reps 15 Region Core and Lower Body Lie on your side with your knees bent at about a 90-degree angle and positioned slightly in front of you. Support your head with your bottom arm and keep your top hand on the floor in front of your chest or on your top hip. Engaging your outer glute, rotate your top knee open while keeping the heels of your feet together. Make sure to keep your hips square throughout the entire movement and avoid rolling your hips back by activating your core. Pause at the top of the movement for a few seconds before lowering your leg back down to the starting position. Complete 15 reps before switching sides for a total of 2 sets. You should feel your gluteus medius (think your back pocket) working. If you aren't, try altering the angle of your knees, either closer toward your hips or down and away from them, to target that area, says Sam DuPlo, PT, DPT, a pelvic floor physical therapist and founder of Indigo Physiotherapy in Baltimore, Maryland. 3. Cat-Cow Pose With Foam Roller Sets 2 Reps 10 Region Core and Lower Body Start on all fours with your shoulders directly over your wrists and your hips over your knees, palms and knees shoulder-width apart. Place a foam roller underneath your palms. On an inhale, bring the foam roller closer to your knees as your back scoops up, drawing your navel toward your spine and your chin toward your chest. On an exhale, push the foam roller away from your knees as your back arches like a cat, dropping your belly down toward the ground. Complete 2 sets of 10 reps. This exercise works to activate and relax your pelvic floor, says Oluwaiyei Abraham, PT, DPT, a physical therapist who focuses on women's health with Robyn Region Core and Lower Body Sit back on your heels and stretch your arms forward, relaxing your forehead to the floor. Feel your lower back, hips and waist lengthening as you breathe deeply. Gelman suggests holding this go-to yoga position for a few moments at a time—it's highly effective at relaxing your pelvic floor. Sets 3 Reps 10 Region Core and Lower Body Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Engage your pelvic floor. Hinge your hips back and squat down as if you're sitting on a chair until your thighs are parallel to the ground (or as low as you can comfortably go). Avoid allowing your knees to collapse in toward your midline or drift over your toes. Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles at the bottom of your squat. Push through your heels to stand back up. Complete 3 sets of 10 reps. Sets 2 Reps 10 Region Core and Lower Body Loop a mini band around your legs right above your knees. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor and your arms straight by your sides. Tuck your pelvis under and squeeze your glutes to lift your hips off the ground until they are parallel with your thighs. Lower your hips back down to the ground and repeat. Complete 2 sets of 10 reps. This move coordinates glute work with activating the pelvic floor and stabilizing the core, Abraham says. Sets 3 Reps 10 Region Core and Lower Body Start on all fours with your shoulders directly over the bottom of your squat. Push through your heels to stand back up. Complete 3 sets of 10 reps. Sets 2 Reps 10 Region Core and Lower Body Loop a mini band around your legs right above your knees. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor and your arms straight by your sides. Tuck your pelvis under and squeeze your glutes to lift your hips off the ground until they are parallel with your thighs. Lower your hips back down to the ground and repeat. Complete 2 sets of 10 reps. This move coordinates glute work with activating the pelvic floor and stabilizing the core, Abraham says. Sets 3 Reps 10 Region Core and Lower Body Start on all fours with your shoulders directly over the bottom of your squat. Push through your heels to stand back up. Complete 3 sets of 10 reps on each side. Quick Flick Kegels, marches, heel slides, Happy Baby Pose and diaphragmatic breathing are five exercises that help relax and condition the pelvic floor muscles. If you can't sneeze, laugh, or cough without leaking a little urine, you're not alone. Problems with the pelvic floor are common and can happen to anyone.Incorporating specific exercises (aka pelvic floor muscle training) into your overall fitness routine can help strengthen your pelvic floor muscles, as well as reduce the severity of symptoms of certain underlying conditions.Here are five pelvic floor exercises you can try at home, tips to find and engage these muscles, when to consult a healthcare professional, and more.You can activate the pelvic floor anytime, anywhere. But it's also beneficial to incorporate specific exercises that strengthen and target the pelvic floor muscles. One way to design a program is to categorize the exercises for those who have hypotonic pelvic floor muscles versus those who have hypertonic pelvic floor muscles. Hypotonic means you have a low-tone pelvic floor and must build muscle endurance and power. Hypertonic means your pelvic floor muscles are too tight or overactive and need to lengthen and relax. (Unsure which one you might have? Scroll down to the "Tight vs. weak" section to learn more, then return here to get started.)Marcy Crouch, PT, DPT, WCS, a physical therapist and board certified clinical specialist in women's health, recommends 3 exercises for people with hypotonic pelvic floor:Crouch says the quick flick Kegel requires quick contractions of your pelvic floor to help activate the muscles faster and stronger to learn leaps upon sneezing or coughing.Begin by lying on the floor with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. As this exercise becomes easier, try sitting or standing while performing it. Find your pelvic floor muscles using the tips described above. Exhale, pull your navel to your spine, and quickly contract and release your pelvic floor muscles. Aim to contract for 1 second before releasing. Maintain steady breathing throughout. Repeat the quick flick 10 times, then rest for 10 seconds. Do 2-3 sets.Heel slides encourage pelvic floor contractions while targeting the deep abdominal muscles.Begin by lying on the floor with your knees bent and pelvis in a neutral position.Inhale into the rib cage, then exhale through the mouth, letting your ribs naturally compress. Draw your pelvic floor up and lock in your core, and slide your right heel away from you. Only go as far as possible without losing your connection to your deep core; this may feel like your stomach pushing outward or your lower back lifting from the floor.Find the bottom position, then inhale and bring your leg back to the starting position. Repeat. Do 10 slides up and back, then repeat with the other leg.Like heel slides, the marching exercise increases core stability and encourages pelvic floor contractions. Begin by lying on the floor with your knees bent and pelvis in a neutral position.Inhale into your rib cage, then exhale through your mouth, letting your ribs naturally compress. Draw your pelvic floor up and lock in your core. Slowly lift one leg to a tabletop position. Slowly lower this leg to the starting position. Repeat the movement, alternating legs. You should not feel any pain in your lower back. Your deep core stays must engage throughout the entire exercise. Alternate legs for 12-20 times total. Hypertonic exercises may provide some relaxation and lengthening for someone with short or tight pelvic floor muscles. Crouch says the goal is to lengthen and relax the hypertonic muscles so contractions are more effective and the muscles can work effectively. "We have to make sure the muscle can do what we need it to, so lengthening is just as important as strengthening," she says. Here are 2 exercises that she recommends: The Happy Baby Pose is a great addition to a pelvic floor routine when stretching and releasing are the goal. Begin by lying on the floor with your knees bent. Bring your knees toward your belly at a 90-degree angle, with the soles of your feet facing up. Grab and hold the outside or inside of your feet.Open your knees until they're slightly wider than your torso. Then, bring your feet up toward your armpits. Make sure your ankles are over your knees. Flex your heels and push your feet into your hands. You can stay in this position for several breaths or gently rock from side to side. Begin by lying flat on the floor on a yoga or exercise mat. You can also perform the exercise in a seated position. Do a few seconds of progressive relaxation. Focus on releasing the tension in your body.Once relaxed, put one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. Inhale through your nose to expand your stomach—you chest should stay relatively still. Then, breathe in for 2-3 seconds and exhale slowly. Repeat several times while keeping one hand on the chest and one on the stomach.Adding pelvic floor exercises to your daily routine is often a simple way to strengthen these muscles and maintain overall pelvic health.However, in some cases, seeking help from a healthcare professional or physical therapist specializing in the pelvic floor is necessary. Here are some signs to watch for that may indicate it's time to see a professional:leaking urine or stool problems with having a bowel movementpressure or discomfort in the pelvisseeing or feeling a bulge protruding out of the vagina or anuspain while urinating incontinence difficulty emptying the bladder or bowels completely Remember, it's always OK to seek medical care, even if you feel your symptoms are not that severe. Finding the right treatment for your situation can help you feel better and prevent any further damage to the pelvic floor area. Kegels are a type of pelvic floor exercise, but they aren't the only option.In fact, many exercises that work the lower body can benefit your pelvic floor muscles. Squats, lunges, and even certain yoga postures can strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.If your pelvic floor muscles are weak or hypotonic, you may benefit from Kegels, but it's important to consult with a healthcare professional first to get the OK.If your pelvic floor muscles are in spasm, contracted, or too tight (hypertonic), doing Kegels can worsen the problem—whether that's pain, leaking, constipation, or sexual dysfunction. No, squeezing your buttocks doesn't help your pelvic floor—it's usually a sign that you're doing pelvic floor exercises incorrectly. Focus on isolating and contracting your pelvic floor muscles without clenching your buttocks. The time it takes to strengthen the pelvic floor with exercise will depend on various factors, including any underlying conditions and how often you exercise the muscles. In one study, significant improvements were seen after 4 weeks. Participants were asked to do two exercise sessions a day for 20 minutes each.It's important to discuss any exercise program with a healthcare professional. They can help identify exercises that are right for you, including how often to do them and how long it may take before you see results. The pelvic floor muscles are critical to daily functions. They support the bladder, urethra, rectum, anus, prostate, uterus, cervix, vagina, and intestines. This prevents urine and stool leakage. Your pelvic floor helps stabilize your hips and trunk, especially when walking and standing. These muscles also contribute to sexual health and function, including arousal and orgasm.Adding pelvic floor strengthening exercises to your day can be an excellent way to work these muscles and boost your overall health. Remember to focus on form and function and engage the muscles each time you exercise. If you're new to these exercises or want extra help, consider consulting a pelvic floor physical therapist. They can recommend specific exercises and ensure you're doing them correctly.Finally, if your symptoms interfere with daily activities or seem to be getting worse, make an appointment with a doctor or other healthcare professional.Healthline has strict sourcing guidelines and relies on peer-reviewed studies, academic research institutions, and medical journals and associations. We only use quality, credible sources to ensure content accuracy and integrity. You can learn more about how we ensure our content is accurate and current by reading our editorial policy.Braekken IH, et al. (2014). Can pelvic floor muscle training improve sexual function in women with pelvic organ prolapse? A randomized controlled trial. D, et al. (2016). The role of pelvic floor muscles in male sexual dysfunction and pelvic pain. M. (2021). Personal interview.Golmakani N, et al. (2015). The effect of pelvic floor muscle exercises program on sexual self-efficacy in primiparous women after delivery. WR, et al. 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